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ABSTRACT

This guide to sources useful for assessing critical commentary about textbooks describes 25 education and education-related journals which contain substantial, consistent coverage of textbook reviews. Entries for each identify title, publication frequency, publisher, title of column used for reviews, grade level and subjects covered, format, reviewers, and where the journal is indexed. This information is also displayed in tabular form. (FM)

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TEXTBOOK REVIEWS: WHERE ARE THEY?

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We are living in an age of increased state sanctions upon public education, such as mandated minimum competency levels, proficiency examinations, teacher credential requirements, and textbook selection procedures. It is now estimated that about 23 states have textbook adoption procedures, as well as several large, urban cities.[1] Although studies show that school teachers find textbooks the least desirable media to use in the classroom, between 80-90% of classroom time is devoted to the use of textbooks -- more than any other media format.[2]

This article will examine sources useful for assessing critical commentary about textbooks, so that in these times of escalating costs and shrinking budgets, educators can ascertain the most appropriate textbooks for their instructional needs. "Textbooks" can be defined as those instructional materials which span K-university levels, are published as single titles and as a series, for basic and supplemental state adoptions, and are not specialized trade books. Various processes for the selection of textbooks will not be discussed in this article, as they have been profusely addressed in the education literature.[3]

This study of textbook reviewing sources will seek to answer the following questions:

1. Where are textbook reviews published?
2. What access is provided for finding the reviews?

3. What consistency do journals provide in publishing the reviews?

4. How are titles selected for review?

5. Who actually reviews the textbooks?

6. What subjects and grade levels are reviewed more frequently and consistently than others?

7. Are there differences in the textbook coverage of general and content-related journals?

8. What suggestions can be provided for increasing access to textbook reviews?

The investigative process undertaken by the author included the examination of 50 education and education-related journals which were thought to review general and subject-related curriculum materials. Of these, 25 proved to contain substantial, consistent coverage of textbook reviews. These are tabulated in Table 1. Arrangement includes title; publication frequency; publisher; column title used regularly by the journal for locating reviews; grade level and subjects covered; format - single or series; reviewers - signed or unsigned reviews, descriptive or evaluative, written by journal staff or others; and most importantly, where the journal is indexed.

Of the 25 titles included in Table 1, four subject-specific journals were deemed to be the most useful for their coverage of textbook reviews. These were:

The History Teacher - one of the few journals which has

a large section in the Table of Contents titled "Textbooks and Readers" with subdivisions by every title and reviewer. It is apparent from this arrangement that the editor gives textbooks high priority by separating them from reviews of other media. The reviews are long, signed, and evaluative. However, the arrangement can be improved upon by identifying a clearer level/target audience. This will assist those readers who wish to quickly find reviews for a particular level, be it junior high, senior high, community college, college, or university level.

Journal of Nutrition Review - the Table of Contents lists reviews only under the broad heading of "books". Upon turning to the body of the journal, one notices that "books" is divided by level - elementary, secondary, college - and then by subject - basic nutrition, dental health, etc. The reviews are approximately 300 words, signed by specialists in the field, contain ordering information, and are evaluative. Improvements can be made by separating trade and textbook reviews into different sections for the user specifically needing to focus upon textbook reviews.

The Mathematics Teacher - this source includes an extensive system for evaluating resources. A coding system provides quick identification of textbook reviews, the grade level, and whether the source is for the library, professional,

or supplemental student reading. Reviews are approximately 200 words, signed by one of the five members of an identified reviewing board, descriptive and evaluative, although primarily descriptive.

Science Books and Films - each issue explains the review procedure in full, and rates the textbook by either

**	Highly recommended
*	Recommended
AC	Acceptable (no serious errors or deficiencies)
NR	Not recommended (serious factual errors or deficiencies)

Levels are very detailed, such as grades 1 and 2, or grades 10-12. Reviews provide evaluative comments on the contents, writing style, and accuracy of information included. Reviews are signed, and are approximatley 200-250 words. One-half of the books reviewed are received unsolicited, the other half ordered from publishers' catalogs or trade journals. An annual index occurs in each March issue, but arrangement is only by author's name. There is no cumulative index arranged by textbook title or subject. Although the AAAS Science Booklist (hardcover) helps to fill in the gaps somewhat, it only reprints those reviews receiving the highest rating (**), not all reviews, and is published irregularly, at best.

Supplementing these four subject-specific journals are these other review sources:

Curriculum Review - published since 1961, but most visible after 1976 with format improvements and eventual inclusion into the Education Index. By far, it is the best single source for covering a wide range of textbook subjects, formats, and grade levels. It attempts to cover all major textbooks published by major publishers (single and series, basic and supplemental). In 1978, 151 textbooks were reviewed as opposed to 136 trade reviews, although there are no actual figures comparing the number of textbooks published vs. the number of textbooks reviewed in Curriculum Review. Reviews cover the author objectives, methodology, organization, contents, and how the text applies to the curriculum. Reviews are signed, reviewers are paid, and reviews include grade levels and purchase prices, and are usually 1-2 pages in length. The December issue contains a cumulative annual index divided by (1) subject, subdivided by grade level (2) basal programs, arranged by subject and by (3) cluster reviews, containing several reviews on one subject.

EPIE Materials Report - this nonprofit, consumer agency has been in existence since 1966. In the Fall 1977, a split occurred between EPIE Equipment Report and EPIE Materials Report. Subjects reviewed are in the basic

content areas, and coverage is for both single and series, student and teachers editions. Elementary levels contain mainly series texts and secondary levels contain single texts. The intent of EPIE is to keep current on all subjects and grades, so reviews are for texts no older than 2-3 years. Textbook review selections follow the adoption cycles in California and Oregon. Reviews are unsigned and written by volunteers in school districts trained to analyze the instructional design and the strengths/weaknesses of the text. Unfortunately, there is no index to the individual titles of the textbooks reviewed. The only access is through the Education Index and the Current Index to Journals in Education by the general title of the whole report (eg secondary science) which can contain up to 12 individual titles.

Education Index - this source covers over 200 education and education-related journals. Prior to volume 26, one had to look under the broad subject heading "book review" for access to textbook reviews. Beginning with volume 26, the book reviews were listed separately in the back of the source. However, access still can be improved, as there is no single section for textbook reviews as there is for book reviews. At present, for a review to be included in the book review section, it must be at least half a page in length or one column of a three column page. When reviews are short, they are listed under the subject

with the subdivision of Textbook-Bibliography (e.g. Reading-Textbook-Bibliography) in the body of the work, rather than the more identifiable heading, "Subject-Textbook-Review." Moreover, Education Index does not index regular textbook columns which may appear in a journal, although articles in the journal are indexed. Finally, most reviews are listed by subject or author, although most users will look for a textbook review by title.

Book Review Index - this publication includes a code for childrens'and young adult books, but not for textbooks. Access is by author and title, but full citations are provided only in the author entry. This source is of limited usefulness to the searcher of textbook reviews.

Current Book Review Citations - the coverage in this source is brief for childrens'and young adult titles, and nil for textbooks. Indexing is highly selective.

Current Index to Journals in Education - the main problem with this source is the inconsistent journal indexing from subject clearinghouse to clearinghouse, and the lack of any quality control of ERIC indexing. The descriptors "textbooks", "textbook selection," and "book reviews," have all been applied to retrieving textbook reviews. Access is by subject, not title of textbook.

Recommendations

Because practicing teachers and administrators, librarians, parents, school board members, education students and professors, and textbook committee members are often in search of textbook reviews, it would be helpful to see some improvements in the current method of locating textbook reviews. Whether for current awareness purposes, assistance in making purchase selections, or comparison of available titles, it would be helpful to see the following suggestions put into practice:

(1) an annual source complementary to El-Hi Textbooks in Print exclusively for textbook reviews K-university levels. This source would provide the full bibliographic citation to the review; would have access by author, title, subject, series, and publisher; and provide bibliographic and purchasing information for the textbook itself.

(2) an accurate assessment of the number of textbooks published per year and the percentage of textbooks actually reviewed.

(3) a recommendation that general and content-related journals review more textbooks, and provide better evaluative reviews. At minimum, each review should contain the full citation, scope, indication of supplemental aids and field testing by the publisher, extent of revisions from previous editions, and usefulness to both the teacher and the student.

Where are the textbook reviews? They're buried in journals, if existent at all. There is much opportunity for change via expanded comprehensive coverage of textbook reviews and improved accessibility by the journal editors and commercial index companies serving the education community.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Raymond English. "The Politics of Textbook Adoption." Phi Delta Kappan 62 (December 1980), 275.

[2]Marda Woodbury. Selecting Instructional Materials. PDK Fastback 110. Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1978, p. 6.

[3]See "Textbooks -- Evaluation" in the Education Index, "Textbook Evaluation" in the 8th edition of the Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors, and Marda Woodbury's Selecting Materials for Instruction: Issues and Policies, Selecting Materials for Instruction: Media and the Curriculum, and Selecting Materials for Instruction: Subject Areas and Implementation, all published by Libraries Unlimited, Littleton, Colorado.

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NCTE Guide to Teaching Materials for English, Grades 7-12. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974.

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JOURNAL TITLE	FREQUENCY	COLUMN TITLE	LEVEL/AREA	FORMAT	REVIEWERS	WHERE INDEXED
Language Arts (formerly Elementary English until 9175)	8/yr. Nat'l Council of Teachers of English	Staying on Top: Instructional Materials/Professional Resources	K-6 Spelling, literature, reading, writing	-Single and -Series (eg Economy's Continuous Progress in Spelling, 3/78	Staff members coordinated by Sarah Hudelson	Ed. Index, CIJE, BRI Annual Index in Dec.
Journal of Reading	8/yr. International Reading Assoc.	Reviews: Classrm. Material	Middle school & Secondary levels Reading	Single texts- Some series	Signed- volunteers Specialists in field. Evaluative	Ed. Index, CIJE, BRI
Reading Teacher	8 /yr. IRA	Critically Speaking	Preschool- Grade 6 Reading skills	Basal series	Signed- volunteers specialists Evaluative	Ed. Index CIJE
English Journal	9/yr. NCTE	Teaching Materials	9-12 Reading, Lit, Writing Skills	Series —eg Ginn's Reading 720 Series (11-78)	Signed by Carol Kuyendael Descriptive & evaluative	Ed.Index, CIJE
Journal of Nutrition Education	4/yr.	Books	K-12 Nutrition, consumer ed, health	Single & Series	Signed - volunteers	Ed. Index
Science and Children	8/yr. Natl. Science Teachers Assoc.	Curriculum Reviews Resources Reviews	K-6 Science, math, health	series — eg Laidlaw's Exploring Science 9/77	Signed, prepared by NSTA Teaching Mats Review Comm.	Ed. Ind CIJE
Science Books and Films	5/yr. AAAS	Book Reviews	K-12 Science, Social Science, Psych.	Series — eg Addison Wesley's Science Series for the young (5/77)	Signed, solicited from professionals. Desc. & eval.	BRI. Annual index in March. Highest ratings appear in AAS Science Booklist

JOURNAL TITLE	FREQUENCY	COLUMN TITLE	LEVEL/AREA	FORMAT	REVIEWERS	WHERE INDEXED
EPIE Materials Report	8/yr. EPIE Institute	N.A.	Elem–Sec. Reading, lang arts, math, science, social science	Current single, series	Volunteers trained by EPIE evaluative unsigned	Education Index, but only title of issue Not specific text title. CIJE
Curriculum Review Title changed from CAS Review in 12/75	5/yr. Curriculum Advisory Service	N.A.	K–12 Lang arts, math, science, social science, health, foreign lang.	single and series	Signed–paid volunteer specialists Descriptive & evaluative	Education Index. CIJE, BRI. Annual Index in Dec. issue.
Teacher (formerly Grade Teacher)	9/yr. Macmillan Professional Mags.	Keeping up	K–6 reading, math, science, social science. (eg Hammond Reading Skills Series, 2/79)	single and series	Signed	Education Index CIJE
Instructor	10/yr. Instructor Pubn	Reviews	K–6 Lang arts, math, music, social studies, health, science	single and series (eg Math. in our World k–8, 4/78 and VISTAS– a reading achievement program, 3/79)	Signed	BRI, CIJE, Education Index but doesn't include reg. columns
Early Years	9/yr. Allen Raymond Inc.	"Children's Bookcase", "Materials Testing Service"	K–3 Content areas	single and series	Signed–specialists in field, Desc & eval.	Education Index
Man/ Society/ Technology	8/yr. American Ind. Arts assoc.	Book Reviews, Classroom Mats.	9–12	Series—eg McKnight's Basic Industrial Arts Series, 11/78	Signed, Descriptive	Ed. Index CIJE

JOURNAL TITLE	FREQUENCY	COLUMN TITLE	LEVEL/AREA	FORMAT	REVIEWERS	WHERE INDEXED
Journal of Home Economics	4 /yr. American Home Econ. Assoc.	Resources review New bks, new publications, & visuals	9-12 Home econ, consumer educ.	single title	signed, specialists in field, desc. & eval.	Ed. Index CIJE, BRI
School Shop: Industrial Technical Education	10/yr. Prakken Pubns.	Instructional Resources	9-12 voc ed, IA	Single text	Unsigned, descriptive	Ed. Index
Industrial Education	10/yr. Industrial ed.	Books and AV	9-12 vocational ed. industrial arts	Single texts-the art of woodcarving (4/78)	Unsigned, descriptive	Ed. Index CIJE
Vocational Education (formerly AVA Journal until 9/78)	4/yr. Amer, Voc. Assoc.	Book Previews	9-12 voc ed. IA, home econ, business, career ed, agriculture	Single texts	Unsigned, desc. & evaluation	Ed. Index CIJE
Social Education	7/yr. Nat'l Council of the Social Sciences	Book Reviews	9-12 history, econ, geog poli sci, sociology	Single texts-eg The American Economy and Foreign Policy Problems (3/78)	Signed, Desc & Evaluative	Ed. Index CIJE
History Teacher	4/yr. Society for Hist. Educ. Inc.	Reviews-Texts and Readers	9-12 US and world	Single-eg Ginn's People & Civilizations 5/78	Signed, Desc & Evaluative	Ed. Index CIJE
Journal of Geography	9/yr. Nat'l Council for Geographic Educ.	New Books & Maps	K-12	Single-eg Random House's People/Choices/ Decisions Apr/May 1977	Signed-specialists in field Desc. & eval.	Ed. Index CIJE

JOURNAL TITLE	FREQUENCY	COLUMN TITLE	LEVEL/AREA	FORMAT	REVIEWERS	WHERE INDEXED
School Science and Mathematics	8/yr. School Sci. & Math Assoc.	Book Vignettes, Book Reviews	K-12 Physical and life sci, math	Single & Series	Unsigned, desc & eval.	Ed. Index, CIJE
American Biology Teacher	9/yr. National Assoc. of Biology Teachers	Book Reviews	9-12 Biology, genetics, physiology, botany, health	Single texts, lab manuels	Signed, desc & eval.	Ed. Index, CIJE Annual index in Dec. issue
Mathematics Teacher	8/yr. National Council of Teachers of Math	New Publication	9-12	Single texts	Signed, desc & eval	Ed. Index, CIJE
Journal of School Health	10/yr. Amer. School Health Assoc.	New Aids for Instruction	K-12 Health & Nutrition	Single texts	Signed, desc & eval	Ed. Index, CIJE
Health Education	6/yr. AAHPER	Books	K-12	Series — eg Scott Foresman's Health and Growth 1-6 (Jan/Feb 1975)	Signed, desc & eval	Ed. Index, CIJE

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